



Office of U.S. Rep. George Nethercutt
Washington's 5th District
223 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: April Gentry
(202) 225-2006

Nethercutt eyes possibilities for keeping parks open

Congressman meets with Corps, urges Locke to meet with Asotin officials this week

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Wash.) met with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials in his Washington office Tuesday to discuss federal funding options for four Eastern Washington state parks in danger of being closed due to the state's budget cuts, but says residents and visitors will be happier if the state continues to manage the parks. To that effect, the Eastern Washington Congressman sent a letter to Gov. Gary Locke today to press for continued state operation of the parks.

"Two weeks ago I met with county commissioners from Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Whitman and Walla Walla Counties. They told me one of their top priorities is to keep southeastern Washington's state parks open. **With the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial celebrations beginning next year, I agree that this is vitally important. If these parks close, it's estimated to cause \$15 million in economic harm to southeast Washington,**" Nethercutt said.

The parks, Crow Butte, Lyons Ferry, Central Ferry and Chief Timothy, are leased on Corps of Engineers land along the Columbia or Snake Rivers. The State Parks Department has said it plans to close these parks in order to whittle \$750,000 off of its shrinking budget.

In his letter to Locke, Nethercutt cited two primary reasons for continued state management of the parks. "The state is better equipped to continue to manage these parks and their amenities," he wrote. In addition, if the state lets its lease lapse, but then tries to renew the lease at a later date, "it may find it cannot meet the stringent environmental regulations and requirements of the Corps."

Nethercutt concluded that the most feasible solution is to reprogram funds within the state budget, and he suggested Locke take the opportunity while he is in Eastern Washington Thursday and Friday for an economic conference to visit Clarkston and discuss the issue with community members who will be most affected by the park closures.

"These parks mean a great deal to Eastern Washingtonians, and I think Governor Locke would benefit from hearing what the people on the ground have to say about the devastating effects park closures would have on their communities," Nethercutt said.

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